

## Supervisors Audio Forum: Extended Temporary Duty Travel

Welcome to the National Training Center's Supervisors Audio Forum. Today we will have Melissa Graf from the National Operations Center. She will talk about extended temporary duty travel. Melissa, you're on.

Hi. My name is Melissa Graf, I am the certifying officer for temporary duty travel at the National Operations Center. My job is to ensure that BLM travel is conducted in compliance with federal, departmental and bureau policies. Today I am here to provide you with information you need to know to approve extended TDY travel. Many of the travel approval letters received at the NOC approve travelers 99 to 100% of the per diem rate for the locality. Taking the locality and lodging circumstances into consideration, BLM is overpaying travelers by hundreds or even thousands of dollars, depending on the length of the detail.

Extended TDY is an easy target for reducing TDY costs without jeopardizing BLM's mission, so I will provide to you some of the hard and fast rules set by the department, and then I will also cover some items that you should take into consideration when approving this type of travel. This presentation and the supporting PowerPoint slides will be available to you in the Knowledge Resource Center within thirty days, and I will be happy to answer your questions at the end of the presentation.

Extended TDY is when the traveler is in one location for more than thirty days. Often travelers will work compressed schedules of, say, four days and return home for the weekends, or a traveler will work at the TDY location for a couple weeks and then return home for a week. These are still considered TDY extended assignments. A break in service according to the IRS is seven months, so unless the traveler is away from the TDY location for seven months, these rules apply.

The purpose for the reduce rate is that in most cases, when a traveler is expected to be in one location for more than thirty days, there are more cost-

## Supervisors Audio Forum: Extended Temporary Duty Travel

effective lodging options. The reduction requirement encourages travelers and approvers to find these more cost-effective lodging options to reduce the overall costs. The Department of Interior Policy states that the traveler's per diem rate will be reduced to 55% of the per diem rate for the locality, that the reduction rate is applicable from the first day of the assignment through the last day of the assignment, and that a different rate may be approved if fully justified based on the conditions that exist.

The following are restrictions that were introduced with the recently updated department policies. The reduced rate cannot be established to provide the following. Lodging allowance when staying with a friend or relative; full M&IE when the traveler is staying with a friend or relative; payment that will allow the employee to receive more than the full M&IE allowance; the full locality per diem rate, which is what many of BLM travelers are approved; or payment sufficient to cover periods where per diem is lost due to annual leave or expenses of family members.

So for instance, if a travel rents an apartment for their extended TDY and they take a week off for annual leave, the rate that's approved cannot cover the lodging for that week when the traveler is on annual leave. If the assignment is not originally expected to last more than thirty days, but at a later time is determined to require an excess of thirty days, the flat rate should be established for the remainder of the assignments, and also if dual lodging may be authorized when the traveler has to go to another TDY location for a short period of time.

However, the traveler's M&IE and lodging at the second TDY location are not subject to the reduction. So when a traveler goes out on extended TDY, the reduced per diem rate should be a negotiation between the traveler and the approving official, and this should all take place before the assignment begins. BLM Extended TDY Per Diem Justification and Approval Worksheet, which is

## Supervisors Audio Forum: Extended Temporary Duty Travel

attached to IMOC 2010 021 was created to help facilitate this process between the traveler and the approving officials.

By facilitating the negotiation, the traveler will be aware of the expenses and per diem that they will be allowed, and also if the traveler or approver have any questions, they can be answered prior to the travel beginning. We've seen many cases where the traveler has been unsure of their allowances and they end up very upset when they find out the allowances will not be reimbursed after they have been incurred.

One situation, kind of an extreme situation, the traveler took a rental vehicle from Denver to Washington D.C. in order to take a pet on extended TDY. Since this is not the most cost-effective mode of travel as required by the Federal Travel Regulation, the traveler had to pay for most of the rental vehicle expenses as well as the lodging and meals that she incurred to get from Denver to Washington, and then from Washington back to her residence. The traveler was understandably upset and does not want to serve on an extended assignment again.

So when you're determining the reduced rate, the traveler or the travel arranger should do some research before the travel begins, and look for some extended-stay lodging accommodations such as extended-stay hotels, corporate housing, renting an apartment. Many of these types of accommodations include kitchen facilities where the traveler has the ability to prepare some of all of their own meals. When the traveler has the ability to prepare their own meals, it is no longer necessary for them to purchase their meals at commercial facilities, so their M&IE rate should be reduced. Taking the lodging and M&IE information into consideration, the traveler and approver should negotiate a fair and justifiable reduced per diem rate.

## Supervisors Audio Forum: Extended Temporary Duty Travel

Another item to take into consideration that needs to be approved before the travel begins is trips home. The approver may approve trips home for the traveler at BLM's expense. These need to be approved and outlined in advance of travel, the approving official should take into consideration the mission requirements and the duration of the extended TDY assignment. So for instance, if the traveler is only supposed to be gone for thirty-five days, then a trip home may not be necessary. If trips home are not approved, the traveler may still return home, however, the traveler must complete a cost comparison and BLM will only pay for the amount up to what would have been incurred if the traveler were to remain at the TDY location.

So for instance, if I am on detail in Washington D.C. and the cost that BLM would incur for me to stay for my lodging and M&IE would be \$900, but a trip home with airfare and my three-quarter M&IE days would be \$600, then I would be able to return home and BLM would cover all of the expenses. However, if my trip home would cost \$1200, I could still return home, but my expenses that could be incurred through BLM would be capped at the \$900. Another item to take into consideration is use of a personally-owned vehicle. This is one of those hard and fast rules.

If the traveler's extended TDY location is more than five hundred miles away from their residence or permanent duty station, a cost comparison is required, and this is to show that the traveler is using a mode of travel that's advantageous to the government.

The comparison is an estimate of the entire trip costs including the M&IE, lodging, airfare and any necessary miscellaneous expenses that would've been incurred if the traveler had used common carrier. Expenses such as airport parking for extended TDY assignments cannot be included in the comparison, and this is because parking a vehicle at the airport for more than thirty days is not cost effective. So instead of including POV mileage and parking at the airport,

## Supervisors Audio Forum: Extended Temporary Duty Travel

the traveler can include the cost of a shuttle to and from the airport, or cost or round-trip POV mileage when they depart and when they return to have someone drop them off at the airport, whichever is most cost effective. Also a rental vehicle can only be included in the cost comparison if the rental vehicle would have been approved if the traveler were to use a common carrier.

So if things like public transportation or a government-owned vehicle is available, then the rental vehicle should not be included in the comparison. Rental vehicles for extended periods are very costly, so before approving a rental vehicle for extended TDY, please take into consideration the availability of a government-owned vehicle or public transportation such as Metro, buses, taxis or shuttles. Also if you do approve the traveler for use of a personally-owned vehicle, please make sure that the traveler understands that they are not allowed to use the rental vehicle for sightseeing or weekend trips because personal use of a rental vehicle rented under the government contract is prohibited by the Defense Travel Management Office Rental Vehicle Contract.

Okay, now a short horror story about extended TDY approvals. A traveler was on detail and requested approval for \$900 worth of laundry expenses for a sixty-day detail on the travel authorization. The approver at the permanent duty station approved the travel authorization, which basically lets the traveler know that it's okay to spend this \$900 for laundry. The problem is that it wasn't the approver at the permanent duty station's budget that would be impacted by the \$900, it was the budget of the approver at the detail location. The approver at the detail location was understandably upset as they would not have approved these excess laundry expenses, so to prevent this we suggest that the extended TDY approvals be routed to the approver at the detail location so that they have the say over what expenses the traveler can incur because it's ultimately their budget that gets impacted.

## Supervisors Audio Forum: Extended Temporary Duty Travel

There's two ways to accomplish this in GovTrip, either the traveler's profile can be moved to the temporary duty location, or a routing list can be created for the traveler to use for the extended TDY vouchers. If you have a traveler that's on extended TDY or that will be going on extended TDY, you can discuss these options with your state federal agency travel administrators, or FATA's, as they're aware of the implications that come with each option.

The IM that includes the Extended TDY Per Diem Justification and Approval Worksheet that I mentioned earlier to facilitate the process of the negotiation can be found on the NOC TDY web site as well as other travel policies and useful information. The TDY Travel Team is also a good resource of information, they can be contacted on the TDY Hotline, or there is a Travel Team e-mail.

All of these references are included on the slides that will be available to you on the Knowledge Resource Center within thirty days. Now for a few odds and ends.

The approving official has the right and the responsibility to disallow expenses that are not necessary for the transaction of official business or are not prudent, so if you feel like \$900 worth of laundry expenses is outrageous for a sixty-day detail, you shouldn't approve the document until the corrections have been made. Reimbursement for basic phone and cable packages may be included in the traveler's rent if the traveler rents an apartment, however, upgrades to these services will be at the traveler's expense, so if the traveler wants to get, you know a DVR instead of basic cable or they want HBO.

This is the last slide.

Then those are things that the traveler will need to pay with personal funds. Travelers on extended TDY cannot rent from acquaintances, family members or other BLM employees. The reason for this is that an arm's length transaction

## Supervisors Audio Forum: Extended Temporary Duty Travel

cannot be established and we are prohibited from paying these types of transactions. If the traveler's extended TDY is expected to last longer than one year, please have the traveler or the approving official contact the NOC for further information and instruction as these are handled differently because the traveler is subject to taxes on the reimbursements. So with that I will open it up for questions.

All right, thank you Melissa for that wonderful presentation on temporary duty travel. All right, we have a question from Viola Hillman. You're on. Okay, it looks like we're having some difficulties getting to Viola. What about Wendy Favinger? What's your question?

On work-related travel, how do we handle the expenses that they're still incurring at their apartments?

So if the traveler's on extended TDY and they rent an apartment and then they go on a, like a side trip? Is that what your question is?

Right, a side trip, yeah. A work-related side trip. So, but they're not moving out of their apartment.

Right.

So they've got like a four-month lease or something like that.

Right. In those cases, the dual lodging can be approved. The traveler would just continue to claim their expenses at the apartment, and then they would get the full locality rate for the second TDY location.

Right, okay, so it would just be dual lodging. How do you do that in GovTrip? Is that easy to find?

## Supervisors Audio Forum: Extended Temporary Duty Travel

The -

Or, I mean they're actually doing two different travel vouchers. You know, one's like this, these intermittent travel vouchers when you're on detail, so they'd be, they'd be doing a second voucher.

Right. So basically what would happen is that on the detail voucher, the traveler would continue to claim the lodging.

Mm hm.

But they would zero out their M&IE.

Right.

And then on this, the detail or the voucher for the second, or the second TDY location the traveler would claim their M&IE and lodging for that location.

Right.

Making sure that on the first and last day their M&IE is not reduced to three-quarters.

Yeah, right, okay. And I had another one too, if I'm not hogging the phone. You mentioned something about negotiating a fair and reasonable per diem amount, or maybe it was M&IE amount.

Mm hm.



## Supervisors Audio Forum: Extended Temporary Duty Travel

Earlier, and I, and I didn't quite catch the context there cause, and what I'm thinking is once we've established, you know some lodging.

Mm hm.

Cost, if you've rented, you know corporate housing and then you drop down to, say, the 55 percent M&IE or whatever. I mean is that, is that what you're saying is negotiable at that point?

The per diem rate itself, which is the total of the lodging and the M&IE, is what's to be negotiated.

Uh-huh.

So if the traveler, for instance if the traveler is at a corporate housing and they have the ability to prepare their own meals, then they shouldn't get the full M&IE rate, and basically the department policy says that the traveler can't get the full M&IE rate.

Right.

So what you're negotiating is a rate that barely reimburses the traveler for their expenses.

Mm hm.

But doesn't over-reimburse the traveler for their expenses, so that's where the negotiation kind of comes in.

Okay.

## Supervisors Audio Forum: Extended Temporary Duty Travel

Does that answer your question?

Yes.

Okay.

Thanks.

You're welcome.

Okay, let's get a question from Nancy Taylor now.

Yeah, my question was in reference to discussion about leave.

Mm hm.

While you're on extended TDY. I didn't quite understand that, almost got the impression that we would need to pack all our things up and move out for a period of time, for a week or so, or how does that work?

If you're going to go on leave while you're on extended TDY, your per diem rate cannot include approval to pay the expenses for your apartment while you're on leave. So you wouldn't necessarily need to pack up and leave, but the expenses for that period of time while you're on annual leave, you would be responsible for. So if the apartment rent is basically \$20 a day, then that \$20 a day for however many days you're on leave, you would be responsible for that expense.

Okay, now let's here from Rick Shalu.

Yes, this is actually a question from Dan Shank. The question that I have is the definition of extended TDY. If we have employees that are on a 4/10 schedule

## Supervisors Audio Forum: Extended Temporary Duty Travel

and requires them to be on a project for, say, a two-month period, each week they would have three nights of lodging, but the determination has been made due to the location that it's more cost effective to have the employee come back on weekends rather than leave them there for their three days off. If they're working on a project under this schedule, say, for two months, would that be classified as extended TDY, even if they come back and it's determined it's cost effective for them to come back every weekend?

Yes, it would and the reason is that the IRS has determined that a break in service is seven months, so unless the traveler goes out for, you know four days and then returns home for seven months and then goes back out for four days, then they are, they're subject to these requirements.

Okay, and then what would be your recommendation on, you know cause it'd be really difficult to find hotels that would be willing to set up a long-term arrangement of three nights on, four nights off.

Right.

So, so what would, you know and a lot of cases too we've got situations where we barely have hotels that come within our per diem rate to begin with.

Mm hm.

Getting them to reduce it down by 55% for a, you know three days a week of lodging, it's kind of difficult. Do you have any suggestions?

In a lot of, well in some case, I mean it's just not feasible to get the 55% reduction and that's why the department allows for you to justify and approve a rate higher than the 55%. The only thing is that you can't approve the traveler for 100% so if you, if, say the lodging rate for the locality is \$70 and you can find the

## Supervisors Audio Forum: Extended Temporary Duty Travel

traveler lodging for \$69, and you know the traveler would agree to have their M&IE reduced by, you know \$2 or \$3 a day, then there's your reduction.

And that has to be approved on a case-by-case basis?

Right.

Okay, so if a, within an organization if the standard is a four-day work week with a lot of travel, then there's a whole lot of requests that have to come in for every person on every trip .

Well if you, if you have, say, a group of people, if you know like five surveyors are going to be assigned to this survey and this is the place where they're all going to be and these are the hours that they're all going to work.

Yes.

Then you could do one request for all of those people.

Okay.

But the request has to specify the location, the names of the people, the rate, the dates, all of that so that we know what the travelers, and so that the travelers know what's expected of them and what expenses are allowed to them.

Okay.

Okay?

And then if I could ask a follow-up question.

## Supervisors Audio Forum: Extended Temporary Duty Travel

Mm hm.

Other options would be, you know renting a apartment.

Mm hm.

And in situations like that, would the person renting the apartment or the employee that's on temporary duty be responsible for deposits and utilities? How does that work? Or does the government have a way to come up with like the, you know first and last month's rent like they sometimes require?

The utilities would be covered as part of the lodging reimbursement. As for the deposits, most of those are refundable at the end so that would be something that the traveler would be responsible for at the front end, but when it's, you know refunded then they would get their money back.

Okay. So up front they still may be out, you know \$1000 or whatever?

Right, but if they, but when they voucher for it then they would get all that money back.

Okay. Thank you.

Except for the deposit.

Okay, thank you.

You're welcome.

Okay, let's try Viola Hillman again.

## Supervisors Audio Forum: Extended Temporary Duty Travel

Yes, I'm on.

Okay, go ahead with your question.

I didn't have a question.

Okay, thank you.

Thanks for checking.

No problem. All right, let's hear from Chuck Odom.

Okay, my question was already answered. I had a question on annual leave while on TDY.

Okay.

All right, let's hear from Timothy O'Brien. What's your question?

Yeah, my question relates to a comment that you made that said if you are TDY outside your normal pay area, some things don't apply. Now is that only if we're paying labor for that employee?

Right. That's only if the traveler's location changes according to their payroll. So if you, if somebody's permanent duty station is California and they come to the NOC, if their payroll changes to the NOC, then there's a whole different set of rules. But if their payroll stays in California, then the extended TDY rules apply.

Okay, thank you.

You're welcome.

## Supervisors Audio Forum: Extended Temporary Duty Travel

Okay, we have a few minutes left. Does anyone else have any questions? Let us know. All right, we have a question from Alan McConnell.

Just to clarify a little bit on the payroll piece, if your locality changes, your locality pay changes, say that you have a person that is coming from California to Denver and their locality is going to pick up the new Denver locality pay, that's when it would become a temporary PCS. If the locality stays in California and their locality pay does not change, then it's definitely extended TDY. Clarify that for everybody.

Melissa, do you have any comment on, on that, on what Alan just said?

No.

Okay. All right, let's hear from Tia Samuels.

Hi. I have a question on the, the leave.

Mm hm.

If the individuals on sick leave, do those same rules about paying for their per diem costs apply?

It depends on the situations concerning the sick leave. If it's like an incapacitating illness, then we would still pay for their, there are some circumstances where we can still pay for their lodging and M&IE, but there is also some cases where we probably couldn't, so it really depends on the situation. So if you come across one, you know gives us a call at the NOC and we can work through how that situation should be handled.

## Supervisors Audio Forum: Extended Temporary Duty Travel

Thank you.

There's not really a black and white answer to that.

Okay, thank you.

All right, looks like Wendy Favinger has another question.

Yeah. The pay locality thing got murkier for me when Alan spoke. We often bring people back on temporary promotion kinds of details, so they'll be coming in, they'll be at their home location out west, you know at a GS-13 and coming back here to GS-14 with also D.C. locality pay. How does that, although they are still officially employed at their home office, how does that, how does that work, or how does that affect their TDY payments?

In that case, it sounds like the traveler, but their permanent duty station isn't changing at all, correct? They're still permanently located in California.

Right, right.

So my understanding is that they would still be entitled to the TDY expenses because their permanent duty station, they're still permanently reporting to California.

Right.

They're not changing anything, so they would still get their TDY expenses.

But we are putting them on a temporary promotion and it ends up being at the D.C. pay rates.



## Supervisors Audio Forum: Extended Temporary Duty Travel

Okay. Well this has all come up for discussion at the NOC rather recently, so I can ask for further clarification from the department, but my understanding is that the traveler would still be entitled to the TDY expenses.

Okay.

And if anything changes, I mean I'm sure that we'll issue something out of the NOC that outlines, you know if there's any changes.

Okay.

Okay?

Thanks, thank you.

Okay, let's hear from Rick Shalu again.

Dan Shank here with Rick Shalu. A follow-up question kind of on that same point, for example if, let's say we have an employee who's stationed in Sacramento and they're going to be on travel in Monterey. There's two different locality rates even though they're only about two and a half hours apart. In a situation like that, if an employee is on a 4/10 schedule, three nights per week or four days on travel in Monterey, but they're going to be doing that back and forth for two months, would their locality and pay change for that two-month period?

Not normally. Not unless the traveler is detailed to a different office and their, in most cases what happens is like if a traveler's going to be on detail at the NOC from California, then California will still be paying the traveler's payroll expenses and the NOC would pay for their TDY expenses like their lodging, their M&IE, things like that. So if that's the case, then their pay rate wouldn't change.

## Supervisors Audio Forum: Extended Temporary Duty Travel

Okay. It's just that I was thinking throughout California there's quite a few locality rate changes that are pretty significant, so we have a situation where crews come from one office at a lower rate and are working in another area for an extended period.

Mm hm.

Well as long as they're not permanently changing, then it, my understanding is that their pay rate would stay, you know whatever it's set at and that they would be entitled to the extended TDY expenses.

Okay.

Okay?

All right, thanks.

You're welcome.

Okay, James Harder.

Yes, my question also related to the question concerning a change in the pay locality. I'm here in Washington, currently here in Washington on one of those extended details, on assignment from California, but as was previously indicated my duty station, although my pay and travel expenses are being paid for by the Washington office, I'm still a permanent employee located in California and so that, what I'm hearing you say, Melissa, is that the temporary duty regulations still apply? Is that an accurate statement?

As far as I know, as far, my understanding is that you would still be entitled to that.

## Supervisors Audio Forum: Extended Temporary Duty Travel

Okay, cause we weren't told, we weren't told any different, so.

Right.

All right, thank you.

You're welcome.

Okay, our last caller is Alan McConnell.

Yes, this is a, the only time that really somebody's I guess locality pay should change is when the HR Office cuts an SF-50, I think we need to clarify here at the NOC a little bit what that is and maybe possibly get an IM out to make sure that everybody understands that, or understands how that locality pay piece works. If you have an individual that's from California, they can go on a temporary promotion that deals with their base pay, not the locality. Their locality would still possibly be coming out of California, therefore they're still entitled to temporary TDY, or to the extended TDY piece. But at the NOC we'll work on getting some more information out to clarify that for everybody.

All right, thank you, Alan. Okay, thank you, Alan for that information. We have another question from Nancy Taylor?

Yeah. I just wanted to get some clarification on leave, if I could? I was looking at the CFR Title 41.

Mm hm.

301-11.21, and the question asked is will you be reimbursed for per diem or actual expenses on leave or non-work days while I'm in an official travel?

## Supervisors Audio Forum: Extended Temporary Duty Travel

Mm hm.

And it has a part A and part B that kind of contradicts what was shared earlier.

Okay.

So if I could get some more clarification on that. I just want to make sure that I'm, what we're doing here, cause I too am on a temporary detail back here at the Washington Office, make sure we're doing the right thing.

Okay. So what question do you have?

Well the question is again are we entitled to reimbursement of leave taken whether it surrounds a non-work day like a Saturday or a Sunday, or a legal federal holiday, or whatever the case might be.

Okay, so.

According to this, it says that we possibly are.

Right. When you're, when you are on like a, on an extended assignment and you're going to be there for Saturday, Sunday, you know a federal holiday, things like that, you are entitled to reimbursement for those days. The, your reimbursement stops when you go on annual leave, so if you're on detail in Washington and you say hey, I'm going to take a week off and I'm going to go to Maryland for something, then that's when your reimbursement would stop, is when you're on annual leave.

Okay, so here it says your agency will determine whether you will be reimbursed for non-work days when you take leave immediately before or after those non-

## Supervisors Audio Forum: Extended Temporary Duty Travel

work days. So you're indicating that if I decide to go to Maryland around a Monday, I'm sorry on a holiday, around a holiday or a weekend, then those leave days taken would still be non-reimbursable.

Correct.

Okay.

All right, Melissa do you have any last comments?

No, I don't believe so.

Okay, wonderful. I would like to thank everyone for listening to our Supervisor Audio Forum, and please see the Knowledge Resource Center for any copies and questions within thirty days of this supervisor forum. Have a wonderful morning. Thank you.